United Nations E/ICEF/1999/P/L.3

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited
9 November 1998

Original: English

United Nations Children's Fund
Executive Board
First regular session 1999
19-22 and 25 January 1999
Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

For information

Summary of mid-term reviews and major evaluations of country programmes

Americas and the Caribbean region

Summary

The present report was prepared in response to Executive Board decision 1995/8 (E/ICEF/1995/9/Rev.1), which requested the secretariat to submit to the Board a summary of the outcome of mid-term reviews and major country programme evaluations, specifying, *inter alia*, the results achieved, lessons learned and the need for any adjustment in the country programme. The Board is to comment on the reports and provide guidance to the secretariat, if necessary. The mid-term reviews and evaluations described in the present report were conducted during 1998.

Introduction

1. The present report covers the 1998 mid-term reviews (MTRs) of the country programmes for Honduras, Mexico and Peru and the Brazil MTR, which was conducted late in 1997. It also discusses evaluations of programmes for decentralization, community participation and local administration in Peru; child rights in Brazil; and the Special Adjustment Facility for Latin America and the Caribbean (SAFLAC).

Country mid-term reviews

Brazil

2. The 1997 Brazil MTR involved widespread consultation, technical support visits and a joint review between UNICEF and its counterparts, with terms of reference developed by UNICEF and other partners. Evaluations encompassed 45 separate projects and all sub-offices and external evaluators assured objectivity and a participative approach. The country programme management plan was also evaluated and revised in

* E/ICEF/1999/2.

terms of programme management, supply and non-supply assistance, personnel, external relations and fund-raising.

3. **The situation of children and women**. Brazil, with a population of 160 million and the world's seventh largest domestic economy, continues to invest large sums in essential social services, child development and women's rights. It is on track to meet the decade goals of the World Summit for Children and the Santiago Accord in the areas of health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation. However, spending levels are not adequate to these tasks; a 1996 budget analysis revealed that only 12.5 per cent of federal social spending benefited the 40 per cent of the population below 18 years of age. State and local social service spending helps to fill some but not all of this gap. The quality of services is another issue; health services reflect poor spending choices and fraud, and universal primary education is near but overall completion rates remain low. Income is unequally distributed, with the richest 20 per cent of the population receiving 67 per cent of all personal income, versus just 2 per cent for the poorest 20 per cent. An estimated 45 million persons live below the poverty line, including 18 million under the age of 18 years, with strong regional disparities. Poverty forces an estimated 9.4 million children to work, including 600,000 children 5-9 years old. Street children are forced to work and are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. A study in Fortaleza, for example, found that 50 per cent of the street girls engage in sexual commerce

4. **Achievements and constraints**. UNICEF-supported capacity-building and social mobilization efforts sparked public awareness and initiatives on such rights issues as child violence, sexual abuse, social exclusion, maternal mortality, educational quality and child labour. In support of the decentralization of public social services, UNICEF assisted such activities as municipal pacts for children to institutionalize capacity-building, technical assistance and the documentation and dissemination of experience. Diverse partnerships allowed projects to expand and consolidate and many are now fully sustainable. The successes include programmes for community health agents and family health; the child pastorate; support to small entrepreneurs; the rights to education movement; and the Child Rights News Agency. As for constraints, child rights concepts are not fully internalized even by such counterparts as children's rights and guardianship councils, legal organs and key ministries. In addition, decentralization has multiplied the number of projects, sites and counterparts to the point that programme cohesion, monitoring and evaluation and administration were hurt.

5. **Assessment of programme strategies: lessons learned**. The MTR concluded that the country programme had skillfully maintained a mix of partners (from government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), unions, religious groups and the private sector) and promoted their interaction. The country programme was adept at funding strategic or innovative projects that let UNICEF play a "cutting edge" role. Innovation extended beyond programme content to structure and support. Three examples cited were: (a) the creation of new indicators to portray disparities and exclusion; (b) the promotion of networks and mobilization by associating the UNICEF name with an effort without contributing much money; and (c) the mobilization of resources through such new fund-raising strategies as a television marathon that sought pledges while "pro-children" programmes were aired. The MTR also concluded that certain strategies must be modified. More funds are required to increase advocacy networking, capacity-building and social mobilization efforts. Internally, more intersectoral programming is needed to match multisectoral problems and the programme planning roles of the sub-offices vis-à-vis the central office must be re-assessed. The determination of successful impact and coordination of activities among the many offices and counterparts will require improved programme documentation and a fully implemented monitoring and evaluation and research plan.

6. **Country programme management plan**. To promote intersectoral cooperation, six programme areas were combined into three programming units for public policies and rights, specific themes and communication and fund-raising. Changes were also made in the coordination, decision-making and communication processes. The position of sub-offices has been reinforced with respect to programming and management, including fund-raising. To minimize staff costs, 11 posts were abolished and the number of temporary staff is likely to be greatly reduced in 1999.

Peru

7. The MTR process included technical consultations; programme evaluations with counterpart ministries (12 studies were undertaken); and meetings betweeen UNICEF staff, government representatives, adolescents, women's groups, intellectuals and business leaders.

8. **The situation of children and women**. After more than a decade of upheaval, Peru enjoys relative stability. Its economy is among the region's fastest growing and social spending and basic services have improved both in terms of coverage and quality. Never-

theless, striking social, economic, gender and cultural disparities still exist. Since the country programme began, the infant mortality rate (IMR) has decreased to 43 per 1,000 live births, with regional rates varying from 20 to 100. Maternal health indicators have not improved as expected; the maternal mortality rate (MMR) remains very high, at 265 per 100,000 live births and reaching 800 in some regions.

9. **Achievements and constraints**. The country programme's goals, which are identical to those of the 1996-2000 programme for Summit follow-up and the National Plan of Action (NPA), are on target except those for maternal health, universal access to education and child nutrition. The country programme has reached many excluded groups through community participation efforts, special programmes (e.g., birth registration in highland and Amazonian areas) and universal, on-time school enrolment. A national system was developed to monitor the NPA and local plans of action. Special support has been extended to communities that are managing their own basic services such as pharmacies, health centres, development committees, children's defense offices, community kitchens and birthing services. Programmatic constraints include a fragile decentralization process, birth registration fees, family poverty, the social poverty of rural Andean and Amazonian populations and a lack of disaggregated data on excluded social groups. Fiscal constraints include a slight supplemental funding shortfall and major shortfalls for the subregional Amazon programme.

10. **Assessment of programme strategies: lessons learned**. The MTR concluded that the country programme was correct to use its skills and prestige to bring together the Government, NGOs and the private sector. Given the Government's increased allocations to basic services, the country programme was able to complement public policies and place rights on the social agenda. Strategies employed included capacity-building; community participation; and communication and advocacy, specifically for policy modification and institutional and legal conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The MTR concluded that local management and monitoring must be reinforced. The attention to socially excluded groups should be maintained to promote non-discrimination and develop analytic tools to measure inclusion and exclusion. In all cases, but especially concerning marginalized groups, cultural relevance is critical in the design of basic services. In designing service programmes, it was concluded that quality deserved more attention than in the past, when access was the key goal.

11. **Country programme management plan**. The existing programme structure and staffing were found to be well-designed in order to implement the country programme for the remainder of the programme period. No changes are proposed.

Mexico

12. The MTR process, which lasted from March to November 1998, involved the Government, NGOs, children and parents. External consultants undertook a global evaluation, project-by-project evaluations, a study of coordination between donors and an analysis of national transitions affecting children and women.

13. **The situation of children and women**. In general, the basic needs of children under six years of age are increasingly met. IMR fell from 27 per 1,000 live births in 1994 to 25 in 1996. Early results of a decennial survey indicate improvements in the nutritional status of children under five years of age owing to smaller family size, greater urbanization, higher levels of maternal education and greater access to services. Pre-school coverage has risen to 80 per cent for children aged 4-6 years but rates for children up to age three years are stagnant, in spite of non-formal programmes managed by NGOs and mothers. Safe water coverage has increased, especially in rural areas, though universal coverage is not yet within sight. Sanitation shows the same pattern All these changes have occurred against a backdrop of profound political change, regional conflict, financial stress due to falling petroleum prices, continued rural-urban migration and enduring unequal income distribution.

14. **Achievements and constraints**. The MTR recognized the broad achievements of the country programme, including its role in providing strategic support to the Government in meeting the goals of the World Summit for Children, most of which have been or will be reached. There is also progress being made towards the goals that will not be reached, including those for maternal mortality, child malnutrition and safe water. Widespread diffusion of child rights information and mobilization for respect of these rights have been complemented by specific actions to support federal and state programmes to reduce inequality. Children's rights are increasingly respected by the State and society. A milestone achievement was the 1997 "children's elections", which allowed children to express their opinions and also disseminated information about the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Rights advocates hope that the increased popular concern will help to achieve key legislative changes. UNICEF and its allies are working

for a broad national agreement on children that will unite the public and private responsibilities of government, communities and families. The UNICEF programme works with other donors to multiply resources and impact. Social, political and economic dimensions of inequality must be analyzed more deeply, with quicker action to intercept deteriorating cases or to document experiences that deserve national replication.

15. **Assessment of programme strategies: lessons learned**. The MTR found the country programme's goals of reducing inequality, meeting the goals of the World Summit for Children and supporting implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to be well-chosen and still valid. However, the MTR agreed that it is necessary to define more precisely the objectives of each goal, the relationships between them and how they may be achieved. Evaluations are improving but programme monitoring is basically administrative and there has been little progress in introducing timely corrections during project and programme execution. The MTR also called for a broadening of vision in some areas, especially inequality, which must be considered in all its dimensions. The Summit goals should guide planning with states, municipalities and civil society and the Convention must be the basis for all programming and organized participation. Similarly, as objectives are reformulated, strategies must more consciously converge to support one another. The MTR noted that support for institutional capacity-building should permit a reduced UNICEF presence in the provision of basic services and financial cooperation. A shift is proposed towards technical assistance for rights-based programming. Further, the participation of social groups in programme development and execution should be strengthened. Finally, local fund-raising can both benefit from and contribute towards alliances and should be considered as a valuable programming strategy.

16. **Country programme management plan**. Programmes will focus collectively on four broad approaches to realize the reformulated goals: (a) reinforcement of rights; (b) realization of the decade's goals; (c) increased emphasis on public policy reform; and (d) convergence of programmes in priority states. Capacity-building and social mobilization strategies will be more prominent. The executive committee overseeing the country programme will be strengthened and its members jointly charged with planning, monitoring and evaluating projects. Two specific tasks are to make programme objectives more coherent and improve coordination with counterparts and other United Nations agencies. A review will be undertaken to judge whether expected funds will require changes in the staffing structure.

Honduras

17. The MTR exercise, which took place from February to September 1998, was guided by an interinstitutional evaluation team. Participants from the Government, civil society and UNICEF took part in an updating of the situation analysis, a programme review and a three-day MTR meeting. The MTR took place prior to the devastating hurricane that affected much of Central America and the Caribbean in October-November 1998, with Honduras especially hard hit. The situation of children and women was dramatically affected by this tragedy, and the Acting Regional Director will provide updated information to the Executive Board at the first regular session in January 1999.

18. **The situation of children and women**. Despite an improving economy, foreign debt remains a burden and two thirds of the population live in poverty. Income disparities are great, with the wealthiest 10 per cent of the population receiving on average 30 times more than the poorest 10 per cent. Regional trends towards peace have allowed Hondurans to consolidate their democracy, increase civil participation and modernize the State. Owing to immunization and other efforts, IMR declined from 52 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 42 per 1,000 live births in 1997. The decade goal for reducing IMR is within reach, but improvements in the use rate for oral rehydration therapy are are not being maintained and there is little progress in reducing malnutrition and promoting breastfeeding. Pre-school education coverage remains low at 37 per cent (1997) and primary school enrolment reached 87 per cent in 1996, although problems concerning quality persist. Coverage for potable water increased to 78 per cent (1996) but universal coverage will not be achieved by 2000. The MMR is the fourth highest in Latin America and Honduras has over half of Central America's confirmed HIV/AIDS cases. Clear gender discrimination still confronts women in terms of labour, basic services, income and higher education.

19. **Achievements and constraints**. Child survival programmes include support to health decentralization, immunization, growth monitoring and the integrated management of childhood illnesses. Access in target regions has increased by 20 per cent, with gains seen in management, quality and equity. Constraints include lower-level administrative weakness and rapid staff turnover. The private sector has become involved in food fortification but the impact and sustainability have yet to be evaluated. The water and environmental sanitation programme successfully introduced low-cost, small diameter sewers. In education, the pilot non-formal, pre-

school education centres have laid the foundations for expansion of service and quality. Likewise, model community child-care homes are increasingly being adopted by the Government, NGOs and private enterprise.

20. Administrative restructuring impeded some efforts, but an alliance of authorities and grass-root religious groups were successful in promoting citizen education for peace in democracy, human rights and participation in local development. Effective use of the media has increased the acceptance of child rights ethics, which in turn has eased programme implementation. Mayors are renewing the "Pact for Children", i.e., committing their localities to goals for children by directing more local resources to them. The country programme has helped to develop key new state institutions including the Institute for Children and the Family and an Office of the State Attorney for Children and the Handicapped. Successes have also been recorded through emergent civil organizations receiving UNICEF support, notably regional coordinating bodies. After an intense advocacy campaign, a Law for Prevention and Condemnation of Domestic Violence Against Women was passed in 1997. Youth mobilization efforts were less successful because of lack of government support and weak institutional capacity, as well as the damage caused by the suppression of youth activities in the past decade.

21. **Assessment of programme strategies: lessons learned**. The MTR agreed that UNICEF had a comparative advantage and should reinforce municipal capacities in participatory planning, resource mobilization and communication. This would permit further decentralization of the country programme, including annual planning with regional health and education directorates and rights commissioners. Decentralization, however, will require increased geographic convergence, especially in service programming. The MTR also found that some central-level strategies required reinforcement. Stronger efforts will be required to meet the goals of the World Summit for Children and the NPA. Legislative and institutional reform to harmonize laws with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women must be pursued more vigorously. Institutionally, the MTR called for a new governmental body to develop violence prevention programmes and to implement the National Plan for Youth, and endorsed immediate support for the agenda of the recently created Institute for Women. The MTR also found that monitoring and evaluation activities must be strengthened.

22. **Country programme management plan**. Like all other country programmes, the UNICEF office in Honduras is refining its programme and project objectives. The programme structure and staffing arrangements of the office are considered effective and will be maintained without change.

Major country programme evaluations

23. Three recommendations made in 1997 to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation culture in the region were realized in 1998: (a) an electronic monitoring and evaluation network was established, with 70 members; (b) an occasional newsletter, "Lessons Learned and Best Practices" was launched; and (c) a working paper series was begun and has issued four reports. Priority themes for 1998-1999 will be strengthening monitoring and evaluation as part of the MTR process; monitoring progress towards the decade goals; and reinforcing the process for creating integrated monitoring and evaluation plans.

24. The three evaluations described below offer different insights into child rights programming. The Brazilian example concerns a child rights programme that funds over 180 projects and looks at the impact of specific initiatives, programme management and the wisdom of placing child rights in a separate programme as opposed to making it a common focus in every programme. The evaluation of SAFLAC examines whether a loosely coordinated multi-country programme can respond flexibly to protect children, change policies and improve national capacities amid deteriorating economies and structural adjustment programmes. The Peruvian case study evaluates whether joint programming between local government and communities can arrive at culturally relevant and cost-effective solutions to a limited number of basic service shortfalls. All three examine which roles UNICEF can perform best, including the evolving role of bridge between partners who otherwise might not be able to establish effective contact.

Evaluation of the child rights programme – Brazil

25. In 1997, the child rights programme comprised 186 projects spending $7 million annually. Its objectives are the promotion and defense of children's and adolescents' rights, access to services for children and families at risk and preventive activities. Its many partners base their specific activities on a child rights perspective. An external consultant assessed the programme's relevance, effectiveness and results in terms of capacity-building.

The methods used were reviews of records, interviews and evaluation of 16 projects selected for their uniqueness, innovation, scaling-up potential and manifest or potential intersectoral integration.

26. The evaluation found that the campaigns against violence against children, sexual abuse and child labour have yielded innovative public initiatives and helped to mobilize resources. UNICEF was helpful in the capacity-building and social mobilization components. Even without major investments, because of its credibility, UNICEF promotes alliances and programmatic collaboration among the Government, NGOs and communities. Technical assistance provided by UNICEF was key in several cases, including an information system for policy analysis and violations of children's rights, and developing the institutional capacity of children's rights and guardianship councils. A lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation has constrained programme development. The evaluation also found that the "rights guarantee system" is improving but continues to have huge gaps. It is an effort to supply the services and opportunities promised in Brazil's progressive legislation guaranteeing children's and adolescents' rights. In addition to resource limitations, social, regional, racial and sexual prejudices create problems, including the widespread belief that children do not have independent rights.

27. The lessons learned from the experience show that a child rights perspective has greater potential to achieve more success than the programmes previously directed at "children in especially difficult circumstances". The Children's Statute is far from accepted, even by such partners as children's rights and guardianship councils, the judiciary and special protection organizations. The association of UNICEF with child rights can yield programme economies; by using the UNICEF name wisely to assist allies' networking, fund-raising or advocacy can have powerful results without major spending. In effect, the prestige of UNICEF is a resource that can be as powerful as fiscal or technical support.

28. Promoting interinstitutional forums requires much effort at articulation and breaking down institutional barriers but has long-term benefits for programme convergence, mutual trust and coordinated action. The Children's Rights Councils particularly would benefit from membership on municipal councils designed to coordinate the action of service providers in the areas of health, education or women's services. The qualitative leap in the campaigns against sexual exploitation and abuse and child labour came from unifying formerly vertical components that had separately addressed physical integrity, health, education and leisure. Approaching issues from the point of view of the whole child is an absolute necessity for success.

29. The evaluation recommended as follow-up that as part of the post-MTR programme restructuring (described in para. 6 above), the child rights programme be placed in a newly created public policies and rights priority programme. Based on new intersectoral and rights criteria, priority themes for 1998 are child labour; the right to education of vulnerable children; sexual abuse and exploitation; nutrition; quality of life; and environmental citizenship (eradicating child labour in urban waste deposits).

Evaluation of the Special Adjustment Facility for Latin America and the Caribbean, preliminary results - The Americas and Caribbean Regional Office

30. SAFLAC assists Latin American and Caribbean countries coping with social deterioration following economic crisis and structural adjustment. It fosters policies combining adjustment with growth recovery and protection and it supports innovative cost-effective social programmes. SAFLAC allocates between $3 million and $6 million each biennium for 20-50 projects. Five types of projects are supported: (a) social policy design/implementation; (b) service decentralization and NPAs for Children; (c) child rights advocacy/mobilization; (d) national and local capacity-building; and (e) information systems for monitoring the situation of children. Examples of projects are an infant and maternal health programme in Bolivia, a social development plan in Guatemala, an anti-poverty programme in Costa Rica and a child law project in Venezuela.

31. Two external evaluators reviewed documentation, interviewed UNICEF staff and counterparts and visited six countries with a representative array of projects. The evaluation examined whether large-scale objectives were met, the impact on the profile of UNICEF in beneficiary countries and the management structures of the regional and country offices. Lessons learned may lead to changes and will help UNICEF globally to determine if such funds merit replication. The evaluation is important for child rights issues from the perspective of public policy, capacity-building, the development of monitoring and evaluation, communication, mobilization and internal UNICEF oversight.

32. According to the evaluations's preliminary findings, new institutional cooperation was fostered

between UNICEF and host countries. SAFLAC turned the priorities of UNICEF country offices towards innovation and public policy. SAFLAC became part of the emergent child rights approach in UNICEF cooperation, helping the region to move away from traditional assistance. In creating forums and relationships between UNICEF and social policy definers, UNICEF gained increased access and important advocacy avenues. Projects are characterized by increased popular participation in design and execution. Sustainability appears unusually high for innovative projects. Decentralization showed mixed results; subnational levels are grappling with their new responsibilities and most local plans of action did not get far. Skilled social mobilization and communication efforts resulted in approval of laws and codes benefiting children. SAFLAC was a particularly important support for developing information systems that track (often new) social indicators. SAFLAC did not help to mobilize donor funds, contrary to UNICEF expectations. The regional office's management of the whole process was questioned in terms of evaluating projects and disseminating findings.

33. A number of lessons were learned during the exercise. The growth of UNICEF as a partner in social and rights policy-making might have happened without SAFLAC, but it is believed by many participants that SAFLAC funds nourished the process. The benefits came not from the size of the material or financial contributions, but from the strategic way in which they were used. Respondents repeatedly complimented SAFLAC projects for their precise focus, flexibility, diversity and innovation and for moving quickly to seize opportunities. SAFLAC appeared to reach one limit, however. It did not affect economic policies as it affected social policies. Influencing economic policy may require other strategies and perhaps additional advocacy targets. It also became clear that a regional fund requires more active management at the regional level. The country offices' observations on coherence, evaluation, and dissemination require adjustments.

Decentralization, community participation and local administration - Peru

34. This programme supports making public policies more inclusive, participatory and culturally relevant. Working with historically excluded regions and social groups, projects reduce inequality by raising local awareness and service demand and involving communities in implementation and self-monitoring. Three projects were evaluated: (a) local administration committees, which are negotiation and coordination forums uniting local residents, municipalities and public and private service providers such as NGOs; (b) the initiative to universalize on-time school enrolment, which mobilizes communities to identify school-age children who are not attending school, devise and implement enrollment strategies and monitor and react to their attendance and integration; and (c) local committees for shared health administration, which provide community health services and oversee budgets and services to increase quality and efficiency. The evaluation focused on the quality of local administration, the vitality of civic participation and the social inclusiveness that was achieved. External evaluators interviewed officials, users, parents and community members, made local visits and reviewed health and education surveys and administrative records.

35. The evaluation found that public policy is better articulated when government and civil society work together. UNICEF is effective as a bridge connecting diverse actors, maintaining a focus on child rights and stimulating demand. The participation of civil society in social monitoring increases the demand for service and for accountability. Co-managed services showed greater use by the population, increased productivity and greater efficiency and equity. Owing to the initiative to universalize on-time school enrolment, 70,000 children, especially girls, have started their education. The participatory research-action methodology used to locate unschooled children and understand the reasons for their non-attendance was critical, as was stressing education as a right to be respected by parents and the community once services are present.

36. The evaluation concluded that the programme is fundamentally sound and no significant changes are anticipated. The programme's expansion and replication will be proposed, particularly through governmental and other donor financing.

Conclusion

37. The MTRs and evaluations demonstrate live processes around country programming at the field level. These exercises exhibit reflection and refinements in terms of content, processes and structure of both programme approaches and offices. UNICEF offices in the region and their counterparts are permanently looking at how rights can be more fully realized and they are using these exercises to meet the goals of the World Summit for Children.